

1956

# outposts

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RONALD GASKELL  
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MABEL PARKER  
FRANCIS BERRY  
LOUIS JOHNSON  
ANTHONY NEWMAN  
B. EVAN OWEN  
A. P. COURTLAND  
ROBERT CONQUEST

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

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VERNON WATKINS

*The Immortal in Nature*

I MUST forget these things, and yet lose none.  
Music is light, and shadows all are they.  
White is the fountain that begot the sun.  
Light on the petal falls; then falls the may.

Sometimes the vulture sees his carrion  
A speck on Ganges. White on Himalay  
The snows ascend above the light of dawn.  
Though distance calls us like a clarion,  
How ancient is the voice our souls obey.

I tell my soul : Although they be withdrawn,  
Meditate on those lovers. Think of Donne  
Who could contract all ages to one day,  
Knowing they were but copies of that one :  
The first being true, then none can pass away.

Where time is not, all nature is undone,  
For nature grows in grandeur of decay.  
These royal colours that the leaves put on  
Mark the year living in his kingly way;  
Yet, when he dies, not he but time is gone.

Beethoven's music nature could not stun.  
Light rushed from Milton.

See the Sistine ray.  
There burns the form eternally begun.  
That soul whose very hand made marble pray,  
The unttempted, mightiest master, holds in sway  
The wrestling sinews death had seemed to own  
And might have owned, but that they were not clay.

NORMAN MACCAIG

*Poem For A Goodbye*

WHEN you go through  
My absence, which is all of you,  
And clouds, or suns, no more can be my sky,  
My one dissembling will be all—  
The inclusive lie  
Of being this voice, this look, these few feet tall.

The elements which  
Made me from our encounter rich  
Cannot be uncreated: there is no  
Chaos whose informality  
Can cancel so  
The ritual of your presence, even gone away.

You, then, and I  
Will masquerade a lie,  
Diminishing ourselves to be what can  
Seem one without the other, while  
A greater man,

In hiding, lies behind this look, this smile.  
It's he who will,  
Across sad oceans, meet you still,  
Startling your carelessness with that once was.  
His voice from this past hour will speak,  
**Cancelling Time's laws;**  
And in the world's presence his hand will touch your cheek.

Foreign can be  
Only that sound to you and me.  
There is no thought that in its dying goes  
Through such a region we do not  
In it compose  
Each other's selves, each in the other's thought.  
You leave behind  
More than I was, and with a kind  
Of sad prevarication take with you  
More than I'll be till that day when  
Nothing's to do  
But say, "At last", and we are home again.

F. PRATT GREEN

*The Tide was Out*

THE tide comes in. Women too old for love  
dawdle down cobbled streets  
wearing their husbands like a glove.

With the wrong caption in its eye  
a seagull circles the bone-dry harbour,  
posterisque in a cobalt sky.

Cameras click and churr. But discontent  
blurs the picture—can it be  
for lack of the reflective element,

or the double image? No fisherman  
preparing his bait, no spectator, sees  
upside-down the motionless swan,

or himself shaken. Out-of-focus  
in the heat, the town's a mere mirage  
and history more than half bogus,

a bore. After a valedictory boom  
in teas and trinkets, the snake of cars  
slides to the top of the dark combe.

The tide comes in. Gently it fills  
the net-hung harbour, washing its bed  
of the day's assorted ills,

Soon the dipping of an oar  
ruffles a reflection only tranquillity  
could have given or can restore.

D. J. ENRIGHT

*Frankenstein*

IF you write a poem with hatred in the heart,  
the poem may die, but the hatred will last.  
If you write about monsters, you bring them to birth  
—monsters eat a lot and they eat rather fast.

Our poets were a sort of clever crazy doctors  
who manufactured muck-heaps and called them Man.  
Every poor innocent who goes to find the world  
shall bow down before them and dishonour his clan.

The public complain that young writers are tongue-tied  
—perhaps struck dumb by listening to their elders?  
The public complain that poets look like bankers  
—but on whom have they always and safely relied?

What with complainings and remedies, smells and flies,  
no poem luckily has much chance of being heard.  
But the poet must remember that what he says just once  
is true—no second thoughts can cancel his last word.

*Japan.*

## RONALD GASKELL

### *Vincent*

FIRST there was nothing but his own wrist  
To rage at—that it could go on fumbling  
What the eye's glare thrust at it :  
Earth walking, or a bunch of fingers  
Coarse as the food they preyed on  
Yet in the raw lamplight hopelessly alive.

Then the thirst for colour :  
For a blue so clear it would be not paint  
But water any woman of Arles could rinse  
Her clothes in ; or the incessant search  
For a yellow you could hammer like the slain tree  
Of a drawbridge, of a bed, floor, chair.

And with that, the struggle to keep everything in place  
At once : the fight to hold the chair at bay  
While bed and floorboards reared at each other  
In their agony, till, a truce signed,  
They could league their forces to reject this copy  
Of a lost chair from their completed world.

Perhaps it helped to have people there.  
If the bighoned face of a woman in a café  
Could be stilled, even for a moment, in the modelling  
Of cheek, throat and shoulder, life  
Could be contained at least, no longer spouting  
Cypresses or whirling an intense sun.

But in the end fields that he had maddened with the fury  
Of his eye broke loose. Wheat's brightness  
Sang like a swarm of bees in his shorn ear;  
Crows spawned in an ocean that had smeared  
The sky out, and the contorted earth  
Howled its triumph through the plowed furrows of his mind

### VERNON SCANNELL

#### *The Double Meaning*

I N the dark silence of the trembling room,  
After the white cries and keening,  
The false surrenders and sighing,  
Lie quietly the man and woman.

Their heads are almost touching  
On one complaisant pillow,  
Skulls which cabin secrets  
And the same curling sorrow.

Each grieves for the wounded other.  
The tears cannot be shed :  
Each knows the double meaning  
Of the double bed.

### GEORGE HARTLEY

#### *The Dispossessed*

T HE absolute contention was the bone  
That felt at home in Adam's fleshy side;  
God stole this rib (for Eve) to keep him warm,  
It is a comfort that his shame was pride.

Eve held the simple apple in her hand  
Which made the sin original at first  
But now this virile lover is unmanned  
And proves by that he must endure his thirst,

Regret this glorious sense in having won  
Not just the most important part but all,  
Becoming by subtraction just the one  
To desire and possess the roundest whole.

It seems the garden plays the same mistake,  
Actuality proved this precept wrong  
But in fact it worked a beautiful fake—  
(This knowledge came with waiting long).

Yet why grace the vulgar with sacred names?  
(My object becomes in turn objection)  
No idle penetration of a worm's  
Sufficient love to clothe a skeleton.

But now I will amend my written will,  
For my will is the strongest and bequeaths  
What's mine in you, and keeps you still  
Yet moves you to love what love retrieves.

This vicious circle begins where our ends meet  
And death inherits death, that's why we part;  
I do not leave you where true lovers cheat  
And you've arrived too late to make me start.

## RANDOLPH STOW

### *Child with Coral*

A BRANCH of whitest stone—a frozen tree  
Plucked from the haunted forests of the sea—  
A coral bough, cold, strange as Scylla's hair.

Take, hold it. Now the wonder grows; she strives  
To know how those successive insect-lives  
Could build the tapered harmony seen there.

I might, in metaphysical conceit,  
Apply this emblem to the world's unrest—  
But no : let her be happy with the sweet;  
I have no taste for such an angry jest.

*Australia.*

W. H. PETTY

*Nightmare in Bruges*

THE bells wrangling among the tangled towers  
Of midnight  
And the lithe mists eeling around windows  
Leisurely  
Probe the thick tides of damp haired Summer sleep  
And coax ideas into a waking mind.

To play the brisk piano of a brain  
In moonlight  
Makes one aware of the independence  
Of the notes  
Which move throughout the day in contrapuntal  
Dignity but can at night jazz freely.

So the white chair and voluptuous basin,  
Dead curtains,  
The map lined carpet and the sliding book,  
Hands on sheet  
Are moon-lit into separate lives  
Unpatterned by the scholarship of the skull.

PHOEBE HESKETH

*Too Late*

THE wind is tearing the hair of the trees,  
Plucking life out by the roots.  
On naked wires dark swallows make a frieze  
Against pale skies of their departure; fruits  
Of the soaring year are shrinking through the fall—  
All curves are closing, and the swinging gate  
Clicks like the last guest's going. Now too late  
We look back to the green resolves of Spring—  
A stone in the hesitant will is softening.

There's down on the thistle, grey in the hair;  
In waiting fields the sagging cobwebs cling  
And clog reluctant wheels.  
Surfeited with berries a brown bird  
Slips among loosing hedgerows, shy, unheard  
As love's unspoken word.

All is unravelled, and that which might have been  
Is past retrieve, slipped from the raft of hope.  
When the heart is gone, the will can never conceive  
And bring forth beauty in tomorrow's sun.  
We started the run with morning in our eyes  
But have stooped from the burning task  
Beneath a shade of lies, and dare not ask  
If a crocus break beyond this wall of life  
With a tongue of flame in a second Pentecost.

### HUGH CREIGHTON HILL

#### *One of Soame Jenyns's Thousands*

**M**Y heart like a dog at a fair  
scampers between the pavilions of grace  
distracted by shade and the glare  
cast by the gaudy intensity there  
afraid of the sounds of the place  
roaring and echoing round the wide square.

Is this now the time to embrace  
rapture, or search for a corner for prayer;  
can this be the night when the chase  
binds opportunity, need, and a base;  
or is this the cue for despair  
rampant and ready to make its own pace?

The questions hang high in the air  
floating unanswered in saturnine space  
and neither Behold nor Beware  
screams from the populous blaze and the blare,  
thus heart in this ignorant case  
never knows when to relax or prepare.

BRIAN PARVIN

*Poet's Path*

**M**OUNTAINS creep  
In mist's flat breath,  
And age is rock paths  
Built with death.

Time and knowledge  
Climb through grass,  
Years between them  
Fall on glass.

Stones in breezes  
Burn fierce hair,  
Mounting steps  
Is more than flair.

And for a poem  
Hands lock truth,  
To shout through mist  
A man needs youth.

And in my mind  
The mountains creep  
Round leaning moons  
My fingers weep.

CHRIS BJERKNES

*From Canticles of the Soul*

**N**O dream is gentle, caught between time and sleep,  
no dream nor sinner in his tread across some wild vision  
is dipped into the garden of heaven, and as Eve  
no bird sings to find a thousand tears nor dark  
light trespassing across her fearful summer,  
no longer the three white leopards, no world in the stillness  
of the word, which swirls beyond the meagre point  
of the silences.

Only the quietness,  
the question mark flung toward the infinite and  
never quite there, only the fall  
where villagers trespass round, the trees unleaved  
wave their bare arms, the sun is down, and my tears  
taste the pure chill of air, its soft sounds  
and of some child coldly playing across the square;  
not of this world; nor can I find the juniper above the reposed  
saint, the sacred scent of blossoms, only the raw shapes  
twisting through the vapid air like a coil of struggling  
hair, moving to hope, moving but fallen where there is  
no turning beyond or before, only here, the mouth blown  
to fill the breath is all,  
is there more?

U.S.A.

### MABEL PARKER

#### *L'istesso Tempo*

THE silver-sweet cascades of notes  
Are threaded on their dryad-strings.  
The crystalline cadenza floats  
On Philomela's tonal wings  
And there is music everywhere,  
Bejewelled spindrift on the air.

Who listens culls a blissful dream,  
Where moonlight on Mozart's lagoon  
Mirrors so sensitive a theme,  
That dawn arises far too soon—  
The fervour of the music dies,  
Grey shadows mute those melodies.

Yet moon-gold masquerades remain,  
Ambrosial as pot-pourri.  
The echoes of the sweet refrain  
Reverberate in memory,  
While phantom semiquavers play  
Concerto-trails of yesterday.

FRANCIS BERRY

*The Bludgeoner*

**H**OBBOGOMMINAL or The Chubb Lout or The Doll Mouth  
Or just Dull Mouth or (more informally) Clumper  
Or Clod (in the East Midlands) or Slug Head  
Or Body Balm (that's ironical) or just Death Bod are the names  
Given variously to this special devil who comes first  
On waking and is the worst.  
Oh, he's a coarse

Stumbler on you out of sleep, lying in bed or rising,  
And he's hugely proficient in the fogs or the greasy  
Mess of January (earlier, in November, having a bout  
Too) right on through Feb into March—but indeed  
Dubbing and lolling all through the disappointing year  
If he has a chance.  
He can league with the weather forecast

Which he does. Then dumb and doltish is the town  
And your job, and all beyond, and this fellow makes you feel  
Your age and your digestion, your bowel weight, head stuffiness,  
Makes you feel your flesh in a turning mill-wheel of corpses,  
Stupidity of spousing, the boredom, and the foulness of budding  
And the stench of all matter  
While of spirit you're a doubter.

He's damned devil, a buffoon, and he sets the caries  
In the teeth of life. He's the enemy of God,  
And of you, and of all your goods  
In your miracle of living.  
So no longer suffer  
In this one form of despair.  
There is a defence. Do it. Say a *Hail Mary*.

## LOUIS JOHNSON

### *Comedian*

**F**AITH of a kind is what a man prefers;  
but he is left to find it by such means  
rewards seem dubious : the desert airs,  
the hungers and the panic are set scenes

along the way of ecstasy. Then some,  
sensing a parallel, must raise a laugh  
against the agonies of the machine :  
and, by the paradox, achieve a half-

measure of truth while fumbling the clown's grail.  
He is the smallest filament of light—  
the god cut down. His fall, while others fail  
to lift the load by rhetoric, is white

and flashed teeth in the menace of the pit.  
It's neither safe to say that he arrives,  
nor pass him lightly off, who is the spit  
fair in the eye of darkness while he lives.

He makes some pity for the human act  
which may be useful. Harlequin in rags  
totters—with all *our* tatters—through that tract  
of tragedy that feeds love to the dogs.

Climbing the golden stairs, he'd surely trip  
and rip the wings off angels as he fell.  
Thus, though he may not reach the final step,  
his grin must drag his breeches out of Hell.

*New Zealand.*

## REVIEWS

*Riding Lights* : Norman MacCaig (Hogarth, 7s. 6d.).

*My Many-Coated Man* : Laurie Lee (Andre Deutsch, 6s. 0d.).

*The Nightfishing* : W. S. Graham (Faber, 10s. 6d.).

*The Rock and the Bird* : Sydney Tremayne (Allen & Unwin, 7s. 6d.).

THOSE who remember Mr. MacCaig's earlier books, sprinkled as they were with Apocalyptic images and phraseology, will be pleased to find that the severe pruning his style has since undergone has left untouched the musical quality and the firm structure of thought which made his work stand out from that of his contemporaries. In the present collection Nature is often the starting-point for his poems, but almost immediately his ideas spring to life and take control. What eye and ear so faithfully report is analysed with rare technical skill until its full significance has been extracted. In *Birds all Singing*, for instance, he begins on a casual note as he examines the apparent discrepancy between the sweetness of bird song and the instinct which compels its utterance, the urge to preserve territorial rights.

"Not passion but possession. A miserly  
Self-enlargement that muddles mine and me  
Says the half-acre is the bird, and he,  
Deluded to that grandeur, swells, and with  
A jolly roundelay  
Of boasts and curses establishes a myth."

This leads by a natural process of association to the human figure beneath the boughs—

"So he, his own enlargement also, thinks  
A quiet thought in his corner that creates  
Territories of existence, private states  
Of being where trespassers are shot at sight;  
And myth within myth blinks  
Its blind eyes on the casual morning light."

Not many of the poems reach this standard, of course, but the book as a whole is impressive and thoroughly earns its recommendation by the Poetry Book Society.

To say that Mr. Laurie Lee's poetry is descriptive rather than dramatic or philosophical is hardly to do justice to the acuteness of perception, the richness of imagination, and the impressionistic

grasp of subject which have gone to the making of his latest book, *My Many-Coated Man*, a recent choice of the Poetry Book Society. With a sudden unexpected image Mr. Lee can recapture a mood or scene in all its original freshness and crystallize it in a lyric of almost flawless technique. It is a poetry of being rather than of becoming, depending entirely upon the poet's unusual way of looking at life. Having established a new connection between the various forms of life which he notes around him, Mr. Lee is perhaps a little too willing to leave it at that and makes no attempt to develop his themes. The method is particularly apt for *Boy in Ice* in which he describes the experience of seeing the face of the boy he was "time-fixed in ice"—

"You stare into my face  
Dead as ten thousand years,  
Your sparrow tongue sealed in my mouth  
Your world about my ears.  
And till our shadows meet,  
Till time burns through the ice,  
Thus frozen shall we ever stay  
Locked in this paradise."

Where Mr. Lee stares back at the boy he was and is unable to bridge the gap, Mr. W. S. Graham sets out on another voyage of self-exploration, determined to trace the way he has come to the man he is, and to reach out to the man he is constantly in the process of becoming. Each new experience is so eagerly embraced and taken into possession that, for this poet at least, it seems to have the effect of re-making the man—

"Now he who takes my place continually anew  
Speaks to me thoroughly perished into another."

yet, at the same time, he is acutely conscious of the selves he has left behind :

"Now within the dead  
Of night and the dead  
Of all my life I go.  
I'm one ahead of them  
Turned in below.  
I'm borne, in their eyes,  
Through the staring world."

The sea has always been given a prominent place in Mr. Graham's poetry, providing him with a rich source of imagery, metaphor and astonishingly striking language. In this volume it is at the centre of his work. But *The Nightfishing* is not merely a fine poem about a fishing trip, in words which recreate all the excitement, movement and intensity of the physical experience—

“The long rollers,  
Quick on the crests and shirred with fine foam  
Surge down then sledge their green tons weighing dead  
Down on the shuddered deckboards. And shook off  
All that white arrival upon us back to falter  
Into the waking spoil and to be lost in  
The mingling world.”

—it is a poem about life itself. In addition to the outstanding title-poem, Mr. Graham's latest volume contains seven letters in verse and two ballads which present yet other aspects of this poet's versatility.

With his third book, *The Rock and the Bird*, Mr. Sydney Tremayne should be able to claim a much wider public than is usual for the poet today. It is an admirably balanced collection, ranging from the reflective to the humorous, though the author has such a dry sense of humour that the two are never separate for long. Like both Mr. MacCaig and Mr. Graham, he is a Scottish poet, and draws upon life and nature rather than literature for his material, so that his down-to-earth language, his concise imagery, and his ready response to mood and surroundings give his work a strength that is in great contrast to the sham toughness of much contemporary verse.

ANTHONY NEWMAN.

*The Tree of Idleness*: Lawrence Durrell (Faber, 8s. 6d.).

IF this book does nothing else, it effectively disarms slack talk about the “neutral tone . . . nowadays preferred”; each phrase is adjusted to its set purpose and images have their full dimensions, not merely as decorative comparisons, but as and underlying the poet's attitude to his subject, or evoking and symbolising; for Mr. Durrell is refreshingly unafraid of enthusiasm even where the results tend to the (legitimately) romantic. Much of his compactness and precision centres on his eye for relevant and significant

detail, and on his *use* of verbs—"Under a sky *pronounced* by cypresses" or "the islands *rebuffed* by water". Perhaps Mr. Durrell's range is too narrow—he presents mainly Mediterranean landscapes emphasised by laconic evocations of love and classical story; sometimes his imagery seems arbitrary ("squinting rain") or unfocussed ("a village like an instinct left to rust"); and certainly the obsession that he shares with too many contemporary poets concerning art and its nature and expressed in terms of painting, makes art appear a separate element, limits one's degree of interest, and reduces the poem to mere comment or, at best, second-hand creation. But against this, we must set such lines as

"... a man and a woman lying sun-bemused  
In a blue vineyard by the Latin sea  
Steeped in each other's minds and breathing there  
Like wicks inhaling deep in golden oil."

It is the pervasiveness of this tone of mellow serene reflection that is interesting and valuable. If one were to insist a meaning in such vague abstractions as "the craft of verse" it would be to poems such as Mr. Durrell's *Style* that one might best turn, not for tepid neo-Georgianism, but for the virtues of structure combining clarity of language, aptness of symbol, balance of cadence, all means subordinated to the one end-conception. The sea and "the wind that slits / Forests from end to end / Inspiring vast audiences / Ovations of leafy hands" are in turn rejected for "the dry bony blade of the swordgrass". Nor is his verse all Epicurean summer. Leaving aside such minor triumphs of mock-Wordsworthian heroic as *Clouds of Glory* and the atmospheric sensitivity of *A Portrait of Theodora*, spoilt only by its superfluous and over-wrought last stanza, the sequence *Letters in Darkness* suggests how these peculiar qualities of sensuous vitality and lyric grace can be adapted to wider themes—

"Imagine we are living who inherit  
Freezing offices in a winter town  
Who daily founder deeper in  
Our self-disdain, being mirrored in  
Each other's complicated ways of dying."

Experience and attitude communicate simultaneously: words become the feeling.

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON.

*The Return of Ulysses* : Patrick Fernando (Hand & Flower Press, 7s. 6d.).

28 *Poems* : Gabriel Fielding (Hand & Flower Press, 7s. 6d.).

*Footprint in Snow* : Rita Spurr (Guild Poets, 2s. 0d.).

22 *Poems* : Odette Tchernine (Guild Poets, 2s. 0d.).

*The Radnor Hills* : D. L. Bowen (Wilding, Shrewsbury, unpriced).

THE publication of poetry in mid-century Britain is regarded by most publishers as too much of a gamble. Established poets have to fight for publication and new poets have to rely on the whims of small specialist concerns. The literary public is not buying new verse and it would be futile to blame the publishers. The unpalatable truth is that there has not yet emerged one solitary genuine poet from the babbling mass of slick cerebral versifiers, operating complacently behind red brick and grey stone walls. Sooner or later new poets will appear, and if they have something worthwhile to communicate and an honestly individual method of communication, they will find an audience.

And what of this quintet? Mr. Fernando and Mr. Fielding come nearest to striking the spark of poetic integrity from the tiny anvils of their seeking sensibilities, but they both lack the basically essential spiritual stamina, the moral toughness. At least, one feels that maybe one day, under the compulsion of improbably exalted circumstances, they could become the progenitors of notable minor poetry.

The same cannot be said of the remaining three writers. The influences at work in the verse of the two Guild poets, from Rupert Brooke to Cecil Day Lewis, are many and obvious, but whereas Miss Tchernine occasionally hits the right note, her own note, Miss Spurr never emerges from the Yeatsian twilight of the Oxford Book of Modern Verse.

Finally, there is the sub-Swinburniana of Miss Bowen with her Burne-Jones Maidens : "A slender maid clothed only in her hair, / Her hair of rippling gold . . . her shoulders lily-pale," etc. Miss Bowen evidently derives enjoyment and satisfaction from her pre-Raphaelite musings among the Radnor Hills; I, for one, must remain a non-participant.

B. EVAN OWEN.

*Ezra Pound's Mauberley*: John J. Espey (Faber, 10s. 6d.).

MR. ESPEY begins from the assumption that *Mauberley* has now come into its rights, and dissects it and relates its contents and manner to their originals. The method is another matter, and therein lies the poetry; yet the source-hunting is fascinating and worth while. Since *Mauberley* not only sums up Pound's attitude to some facets of contemporary English literary life and figures, but also directly looks towards the achievements of the *Cantos*, it is a vital go-with-me for everything Pound has written and done, giving us pointers towards his poetic soundness and towards those features of his thought which most of us reject.

Mr. Espey identifies the originals of some of the 'contacts' in *Mauberley*: 'Brennbaum' as Sir Max Beerbohm, 'Mr. Nixon' as Arnold Bennett, for example; and enlarges on the reading and translating Pound was concerned with at the time. The influence of Bion, Gautier, de Gourmont, Browning, and so on, are proved obvious and clear. Fortunately the influence of the Supreme Old Bore, Henry James, is not so outstanding, except as a background figure. This is a valuable book, not least because it contains a full reprint of all the parts of the poem under discussion.

HUGH CREIGHTON HILL.

*Rainbow at Midnight*: Lawrence Lipton (Golden Quill Press, U.S.A., \$2.00).

ALTHOUGH the contents of Mr. Lipton's book have appeared in British and American magazines as separate poems (and justifiably so), when collected and arranged in appropriate order, as they are in *Rainbow at Midnight*, they constitute an impressive sequence, each poem adding something to the next, each continuing the development of the theme and contributing to the unity of the whole structure. The individual poems can thus be seen in their proper perspective and it is surprising how much they gain.

*Rainbow at Midnight*, Mr. Lipton's first book of poetry, deals with the present state of civilization. Few poets writing today can, in their first publications, have given evidence of such visionary power or achieved such a mature technique to express a belief in the simple dignity of man and the values necessary to his fulfilment. From the opening *Air-borne* to the final *Ritual of Community*, these poems reveal the author's deep concern with the complex problems of our ailing society, yet successfully avoid the pitfalls of rhetoric and over-simplification. It is true that Mr. Lipton occasion-

ally compresses his thoughts to such an extent that the reader has mentally to jump in order to keep pace with him; that may be due partly to the intractable nature of his material and partly to the fact that Mr. Lipton has access to a wide field of reference, drawing his images and symbols from history, mythology, science, physics, philosophy, mathematics and comparative religions. More reprehensible is the attempt to cram too much into a single poem.

Having examined the present situation from various angles, and emphasised that

"Torn between two worlds  
One has a choice to make"

Mr. Lipton makes use of ritual drama in his third section to propose "a rededicated society that is rational, functional and responsive to the deepest needs of the human soul", based on sacrament, rebirth and community. How man in his need for redemption is to reach this desirable state, even if he makes the right choice, is not made clear in the poem; nor how man is to be reborn and rededicated, for the author seems to reject belief in God. We are left with the question—

"By what science then and on what paper graphed  
Upon what curve of night descending shall we find  
Not darkened lands but cities fabulous with light?"

A. P. COURTLAND.

*Brother to Dragons*: Robert Penn Warren (Eyre & Spottiswoode, 15s.).

HOW rarely, with English poets, does one nowadays get a single poem, on the grand scale and filling a whole book, which is worth even looking at twice. There are many minor points to be made against *Brother to Dragons*. The structure, with the poet himself intervening to argue with his long dead characters, is distracting. The characters themselves are mostly not interesting enough to bear the significance given them. The psychological analyses of their motives are extremely ordinary, indeed almost dangerously so when it comes to the reasons for violence, and tend to involve the writer in the obsessions of his characters instead of clarifying anything. Nor is the verse, (naturally enough in a work of this length), without blemishes. There are parts whose obscurity is verbal—and it is not so much the obscurities one minds but that their roots in the language have not the depth to support them.

These criticisms may sound destructive. And yet they destroy, after all, only peripheral faults. Although it does not quite come off as a complete work of art, and its grip on the moral question is a bit vague and involuted at times, *Brother to Dragons* is a solid achievement. It has been wrongly described by some critics as a "novel in verse" and the necessary descriptions of its main theme only gives the shadow even of the general effect. In the early years of the last century two of Jefferson's nephews murdered a Negro slave in particularly atrocious circumstances. They then attempted a joint suicide over their mother's grave, but one misfired and later escaped to be killed at the Battle of New Orleans. Another cousin, the great explorer, Meriwether Lewis, committed suicide, apparently feeling that Jefferson had not supported him in his great plans for the West. The supposed effects of these insane violences on Jefferson, the incarnation of faith in reason and light, is the central theme of the book.

As I have said, the handling of this theme breaks down occasionally, but in general the depth, humanity and maturity of the verse is a lesson to all of us. It varies from lyrical delicacy to fine descriptive set-pieces, such as when Jefferson speaks of the landscapes of the virgin West. Some of the verbal felicity is the sort of thing we might meet in England—for instance, "Irony is always, and only, a trick of light on the late landscape". But good though this is, it is only surface decoration on a mature and sustained colloquial grand manner. Moreover, the poet has really entered into the period and places he writes of (and by means of solid and significant reality and not that horror 'poetic intuition'). That extraordinary period when the violent frontier democracy in its untamed forests, was yet deeply though almost unconsciously impregnated with the culture of the aristocratic 18th century is a splendid theatre for Mr. Penn Warren's native talent.

ROBERT CONQUEST.

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